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SERMON XXX.*

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THE MORAL DISCIPLINE OF GIVING.

"BUT rather give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean unto you."—LUKE 11:41.

CHRIST, being invited, went in to dine with a Pharisee. His host marveled that he sat down to meat without first washing; whereupon the Lord addressed him and other Pharisees gathered with him: "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." Did not he that made that which is without, make that which is within also? Did not he who created the body, create the soul also? And is it not at least equally proper and important that the inner part, the soul, partake of the cleansing and the purity?

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Assuming that it is important, our Lord proceeds to prescribe a mode by which the moral cleansing, the purity, may be obtained: "But rather give alms of such things as you have, and behold all things are clean unto you." These words present somewhat of difficulty, when we consider that they were addressed to a company of Pharisees, inasmuch as the Pharisees were notoriously given to the performance of these outward acts of charity. They did these outward things, and remained all vile within. An outward injunction, in their case, could hardly touch the infected spot.

Some suppose that the Saviour spake in an ironical strain. As it regards your inward parts, all you have to do is to go on with your tithing system of mint and rue, anise and cummin, and all is clean to you—yours a perfect purity down to the bottom of your hearts. This view we can not admit. The Lord, we think, spoke seriously, uttered before them a great truth, not a stinging sarcasm.

If we suppose that the company of Pharisees gathered on that occasion were, as many were, exceedingly avaricious, given to the getting of gains by the closest and hardest means, and were also given so to hold on upon their possessions that they could not, by any means, be brought to devote them in charity, in any worthy measure, then the Saviour's words, which struck at their pockets, would have also a deeper aim, and strike and enter their hearts.

The difficulty abiding in these words comes from the fact that so much efficacy is assigned to an outward performance. A great commentator, however, remarks, in mitigation of this, that it was the manner of the Saviour to command an outward act as a sign of the disposition, instead of enjoining the disposition itself. But here the giving act is put in a somewhat different relation. It seems to be put as an antecedent, a means to an end—cause to an effect. Giving according to the right standard and mode, is promotive of the soul's discipline—its growth in moral purity, holiness.

I come to this, then, as the main topic of my discourse: Giving of what God may have given us as the means of disciplining, purifying, elevating the character. And I might speak of this discipline as both retrospective and prospective.

In regard to the retrospective action, a few words will suffice; and these are suggested by the context. It is clearly implied that those addressed by the Saviour were given to injustice. They had sought extortions and wrongful gains. In the strong phrase of Christ, "Your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness," all there greedy, rapacious, grasping. What now follows as duty in such a case? This, first, and without delay: Repent and return from such ways. From being injurious, rapacious men, become generous men; do justly, deal kindly. Then, farther, the Gospel enjoins this: Redress past wrongs; make reparation, restitution, as far as it can be done. But there are cases where it can not be done. Those who were the subjects of the wrong, and all

their representatives, have passed away, and can no more be found. Or the wrong is so complex, so woven into the web of other things, that it can not be separated and acted upon, so as to be set right directly and specifically. Where this is the condition of things, what then? Here let charity apply her corrective: "Give alms of such things as ye have, and all things are clean unto you." This disposition and distribution of the estate got by hard means, indicate a softening of the character, even the genuineness of the repentance. At once the conscience is relieved, and the heart is made better by the course taken. The possessions which the individual feels are not his, and can not be put back whence they were wrongfully taken, he chooses to make over to the Great Proprietor of all, by devoting them to his service in the welfare of his creatures. This is the most natural dictate of the heart, once base and wrong, into which the spirit of religion and reform has entered. So was it in the case of Zaccheus. Half his goods he gave to the poor; then the most generous restitution to all whom he had defrauded. Who can doubt the integrity, the moral purity of that heart henceforth? Who doubt that all the residue of his estate was clean unto him? Who doubt that from that time he began truly to possess and enjoy his own?

This is what we may call the backward correction, the retrospective discipline of benevolence. It is not the giving of a portion of ill-gotten wealth to sanctify the rest, also and equally ill-gotten. The principle does not touch such a case. Such a case is only and intensely atrocious and abominable. This is simply a case both of generosity and justice where the opposites of these had been.

We suggest whether this backward correction, this retrospective discipline, should not be matter of thought and consideration now: whether the Lord's cause and the welfare of men would not receive means for their promotion, if there were more inquiring and acting in this direction;—the Lord's treasury receiving numberless fragments, and some huge masses, which are now in hands that would be better off without them. Let each take the candle of the Lord and pass through his own premises—its rays penetrating all the tortuous intricacies of the past, and then let him do what this revealing light shall teach him to do; and he will be likely to do both generously and well; certainly, be likely to improve his standing for this world and the world to come.

But I pass now to what is more generally applicable and practical—the present and prospective discipline of the spirit and habit of giving—giving as a means of spiritual advance, of growth in moral purity; all within, and all pertaining to one becoming clean, pure. The word used here is the same used by Christ in that other place: "Blessed are the pure in heart."

In order to make a man clean, pure, particularly a character

like that contemplated by Christ in the text, certain evil and corrupting things are to be removed out of him. There is to be an ejection of the corrupt and corrupting, in the process of attaining to the clean, the pure. And one in the category of the corrupt and the corrupting—and this a main one, abiding at the fountain—a grand promoter and feeder in the wrong direction, is the love of money. So Paul names it, and then attaches to it this primal and terrible potency, *root* of all evil—pronouncing the love of money the root of all evil. He means that love of it, which leads the individual harboring this passion, to address himself to the work of getting it—accumulating, heaping it together; this his end, his great object in living. The Apostle shows this to be his meaning, in the verse immediately preceding, where he uses another phraseology, "They that will be rich," this is the working and the end of the passion. It resolves itself into the will to be rich. Christ's word chosen to describe it, yields the same idea on being subjected to an analysis; his word is covetousness, which means, etymologically—have more—the desire to have more.

This as a very common desire or passion in the human soul, is quite obvious, showing itself on every hand in the schemes and the toils to get more. This, as being an evil desire, most fruitful of mischief, Paul portrays in that flaming sketch: "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." This passion, how sure to grow! If the person dare indulge it, it will grow and get stronger than he; increasing still in capacity, in greediness, in clamor, ever ringing the repetitious cry: Give! give! The already vast quantity of possession only adds vehemence to the cry: More! yet more!

And under its influence, what wrongs, oppressions, crimes are enacted! And what follies too! This rage for more, in its hight and intensity, seems not only to blind the eyes, but strangely to abate the brains. The Saviour, in addressing one of the sort, a representative man doubtless, to resort to the modern parlance, used upon him the rather curt term, Thou fool. Sometimes it is one by himself, Thou fool. Sometimes—and have we not seen something of the kind?—large masses are frenzied together. There stands forth pretty much a whole generation of fools, inciting and inflaming one another—expanding and spreading out, till there comes a crash and a conclusion; and the whole surface is seen strewn with wrecks of character and fortune. There follows a wholesome pause; and one would suppose that some abiding wisdom would be derived from the meditations and amazements of the compulsory silence; certainly, suppose that such a course and result never could be repeated by the same individuals, or their immediate successors. But it is repeated. The same ones, with the smart of the old chastisement in their skins, and the indented

bruise of it in their bones, will spring forth, eager to reënact the same old fury. So it is that this desire grows when allowed, and maddens men, and ruins characters, fortunes, and souls.

It is plain, as I have already intimated, that in the course or process of becoming clean and pure, this evil desire must be repressed, and even put out. We come now to hint the way of doing it.

One way, a most legitimate and summary way—may I not say *the* way, no other being wanted?—is *this*, namely, by giving. Let a person give alms of such things as he has, and he will be cleansed of this foul and ever defiling desire or passion. But in order to the achievement of so great an end, there must be conditions to the giving. It must be principled, the result and flow of principles—principles in this Holy Book laid down, and by the heart cordially embraced;—Not impulsive, giving as the fit takes, as the sympathies happen to be stirred. Based on principle, uniform and habitual, it bears a just relation to the means God has put into our hands. This is one of the principles or laws in this matter, that the giving bear a fixed and just relation, or proportion, to the means placed at our disposal. And what is the proportion? or what the principle, the rule to be made?

This principle, that every one at stated times lay by him in store for this purpose, according as God has prospered him, would be sufficient, if we may suppose in him the thoroughly Christian heart. To add this, namely, let him lay by for charity a generous proportion, is leaving it still quite too indefinite. To say a tenth of all that comes in, is greatly unequal. There is neither justice nor benevolence in this as the universal law of giving. For the object I have in view, this statement may be an approximate; at least, may stand preparatory to one more definite, namely, that a person give in measure and continuity sufficient to feel it. How little probably is given in the Church of God where this is the effect! How very few, probably, from the measure they give have any, even the least, sensation of inconvenience. Of self-denial, and real sacrifice from giving, I suppose the great majority of Christian givers know nothing. In all such cases, of course, the entire personal benefit and discipline from giving, is lost. According to the statement now in hand, the sensation-principle, the tythe system, or the law of tenth, can be no general rule, for, in very many cases, the amount dictated by this rule would hardly be enough to throw any, even the smallest twinges, into the soul's cleaving selfishness. A tenth can be given, and the man never know, by any appreciable diminution, that he has given any thing; of course, he can give all that, and vastly more, without beginning to feel it. What is done, is but shelling off some of the loose outer scales of one of these Leviathans of wealth. The giving, to be effectual as a discipline, must be on a principle that shall reach and

restrict the desire for getting—the intent to have more; for all the mischief, and meanness, and smallness lie in that—emanate from that. On that it is, all Scripture pours its intense and concentrated exprobation.

What principle and measure of giving then will administer to this the repressive, yea the annihilating blow? That principle which says, "By the grace of God, I will no more lay up treasure for myself," the person at once and forever renouncing the purpose, even crucifying the desire to be rich. Then, that measure or amount of giving, which accrues from giving the whole beyond a certain prescribed boundary. No accumulation of property, does this mean? No, not that. Accumulation there may be, and should be: and the amount, the extent of it, is to be settled in the best moments of Christian experience—under the most decisive action of the Christian spirit, and principle—a definite amount fixed under the felt meaning of that great vow of an entire consecration to Him. It may be thousands, or tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands. More or less, this is its solemn condition and quality; it is a Christian amount—religiously retained as the means to still larger deeds of giving and blessing. Here we have the man, all he has, and all his power of getting, possessing, diffusing, devoted to God. With him accumulation has this purpose—it is for God. It has this limitation—nothing for self—nothing beyond a solemnly described amount; no indefinite laying up. It is a great step for a person to come to this point—costing a mighty wrestle, and the bloody sweat of the soul, probably, to renounce the purpose of personal and selfish getting—the intent of property, wealth. It is something every one will profoundly feel in the conflict—the actual doing it. Some have succeeded in the doing, and have stood forth noble examples of character, and prodigies in the line of giving.

We are sure that, in this repression and restriction just indicated, the course, the action, is right. There can be no mistake at this point. If this thirst for money, this purpose and practice of indefinite getting—all one can, to the end—if this is wrong—has on its face the indignant brand of Almighty God, then is it right for the disciple—made his duty by the law and spirit of his religion, to fix a limit, to build a Christian boundary some where to this fiery and rampant lust of humanity—desire of possession, to have more. This terrible lust—you can't pet it, play with it, and say, you will keep it under. No man can. No man can serve two masters. It will be one—a single allegiance; one up, and the other under. Hence the right, the necessity absolute, that there be ordained the broad line of demarkation—that there be dug in the soul a deep and impassable trench between God and mammon.

Let us see now what is accomplished in the way of discipline—moral cleansing and keeping clean, by the action thus far. This

first and at the fountain—that great, generic, base, cloven-footed, all-defiling thing, the selfish, self-seeking—love of money, will to get it—this in the case supposed, is pretty much wiped from the heart by the one broad, introductory stroke, by that soul's counter and higher purpose, in that soul's true consecration. This higher and Christian purpose becomes the purge, which carries off the filth and slime of the old fever. This purpose, once enthroned in the soul, summarily subordinates and drives out the whole litter of mean and craven lusts. I knew one for years, and loved him, and learned of him, though officially his teacher, and deemed him the model giver of the State of Maine. This was his principle—his purpose. Early and with a true Christian heart, he marked off the sum to be retained, and fixed the boundary; and he made over all the rest, freely and broadly scattering it as it came. The love of money, the desire of holding, he often said, and more often showed, that he knew nothing of it. The faintest breath or motion from this source never, so far as he was conscious, stirred the outer surface of his soul. In the eight years of my connection with him, he gave away probably twice the sum which he reserved as the capital of his business and his beneficence. He is now in heaven, and can we suppose that he there regrets that measure of consecration and sacrifice?

Another thing: the central and despotic lust extinct, at least brought under, then, the wrong deeds so apt to be perpetrated in the eagerness for gain, in the rage for yet more—no such deeds will ever be done. All business, all labors for the world, are sanctified by the soul's good purpose—are a part of the man's Christianity, the dictate of rectitude and benevolence. Never does such an one overreach and craftily haul in huge gains upon an already over-grown stock; never take advantage when he can, and grind the necessitous; never throw blight upon others' fortunes, that he may add brightness to his own. Not a dollar comes into his coffer dimmed and stained by his manner of obtaining it. It is all clean money. From all the temptations of business, his comes forth an unsullied and honorable name. The great and kingly affection of religion, the love of the heart, abides unquestioned in the supremacy. The other graces take their proportion and place; all the impulses of a pure and genial nature blend to produce a character whose descriptive is goodness; its form and winning admirable symmetry.

Of such a character we find that generousness is a prominent, practical attribute. Let us, then, pass on and see how naturally and infallibly the principle I have indicated, produces it; how surely it grows and benignly spreads under the soul's high purpose of restriction upon the world; and the purpose to be "rich toward God." We have already noted the fact, that it abolishes, at once crushes out, the leading cause of closeness, stinginess in a man; this is cause, the desire of getting, the fascination of accumulating—I want here

the Greek's terser tongue, and the privilege to cry, *pleonexia*—have more. Henry Rogers, in a late work, speaks of a man who always gave a guinea to each of certain good objects. This person at length received a bequest which, he says, "might be made the basis of a fine estate." He caught the idea of increasing—rather, that caught him. When asked the next time for his donation, to an object approved, though more was justly expected, nothing was received; not a penny would he give; but a reason he gave; and the sum of it was, that now he had something considerable in hand, and there was a satisfaction in making it more. Before, there was no such object in keeping; so he freely gave; now there was an object, and every little he kept, told on the result. So he kept it, and so he would not give. Just here we have the secret why men, prospered in the world, perpetually swelling their gains, are proportionally slender givers—often the most grudged and stinted in their giving; while those who eat up their income, and not enough at that—those who have made up their mind to do good in the land, and trust God to be fed, are among the foremost in generous deeds. On the one side it is the purpose, the desire to get and to add that dwarfs the soul so ignominiously; on the other, it is the purpose—all for God, which fashions the soul to that largeness and generous doing. And in the latter case, not only is the measure made over, admirable; the manner of it, the freeness and heartiness, make it still more so. Such an one has not, on every presentation of charity, to wage a bitter warfare with the base and servile part of himself;—has not to debate and contend with, and wring at length, a few reluctant driblets out of a dry, hard, tyrant passion, who is allowed the keys;—has not to go and pound and importune, as it were, at the tight door of a gloomy iron box, constructed for a smooth passage in, but a most rubbing passage out. Behold! see how pitifully poor the little creature is! How dreadful hard it comes! Taking from him his money, is very much as if you tore off the flakes of his flesh; and we can seem to see the wry face he twists into, under the agony of the parting. To the man of the other sort, with the heat and lust for more summarily quelled; the great purpose—all for God and human welfare, kept dominant—to him, it is the sweetest and best of all privileges to give. He welcomes every authentic application; even searches for the opportunity, and blesses the man who furnishes him with one. He finds the words of the Lord Jesus true, when he said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." All is turned to a pure heart—comfort—a fresh fountain of happiness.

We see how important it is, that one have at the bottom and the beginning, right principle. It is a grand regulator. One right principle at the head and fountain of conduct, puts and keeps every thing in the region of it, and resulting therefrom, right also. And a principle like the one we have now stated, thus

generic and summary in the prevention of evil, and the production of good, has herein a proof that it is right, and is of God. Just see what it does. This one word, giving, carried through on this principle, succeeds to blot out those other traitorous and engulfing words—will to be rich—among the most tainting and deadly in all the human vocabulary. Planted here, doing this, no taint shall ever touch you; no ill-gotten gain shall ever sear your conscience or burn your palm. The clustering graces of holiness, the rather, will gather around and adorn your character. All that is given will go with freeness and joy; and the result, the amount imparted, shall stand in the end as a noble monument, not of merit, but of grace—the soul's treasure passed over, laid up on the other side, its own inalienable possession, the glory and wealth of its immortality.

Not only shall you be blest in your character and deed, but those connected with and dependent upon you, shall be blest through you as your intent and prosperous hoarding never could have blessed them. Hence, in another sense, all things are clean unto you. By this standard and course of beneficence, by this example of piety, by the prayers which go up from a heart thus pervaded and consecrated, by such large out-goes of charity as shall keep down the hope of inherited wealth in those coming after, you help form an atmosphere of purity for children to breathe and grow up in. The property which, fast held, and to the last skillfully rolled up, wou'd have been a snare to them, an omnipresent temptation, as it commonly is—have taken away their manly strength and salient aspiration, and achieving enterprise, as it commonly does, dooming them, and passing them, with rare exceptions, to the shades of insignificance and blank nothingness in creation, as is most obtrusively and painfully the case—this property, dealt with and disbursed on the other principle, is charged with no such perils—is changed wholly to another, a vital element and issue. The carnal and corrupting given, the spiritual is received; and so the treasures of your home become vastly greater, and richer. The crowning good is that all is clean; your hands clean; your reputation clean; your soul, through grace, clean; your children, through the same grace, clean; all these clean to you.

We should love to commend, could we do it, this principle of repressed selfishness, and of enthroned benevolence, to that great company of disciples who have recently been brought into the kingdom of Christ. How remarkable have been God's dealings with the people since this Board held its last Annual Meeting: the business of the world, by a sudden stroke and shock, thrown into confusion—into complex and prostrating disaster; men's hearts failing them; distress and ruin settling down upon all ranks and conditions; then, directly upon this, almost simultane-

ous with it, the heavens opened and poured down righteousness ; and myriads have been made rich in the inalienable possession. How fitting, that those who have come in, and are still coming, we trust, amid circumstances so significant, and outpourings of the Spirit, so indicative of the grandeur of prophecy, join to inaugurate a new order of piety ; rather to bring back again the primitive order and type ! We would beg of this company of new disciples, could we speak to them, to take their stand for Christ ; resolved to live a life of singleness and generousness to the Master, and the race he is redeeming.

Only let it be so ; this elect company coming along to be such givers and workers, and still rising higher in this divine scale, then shall they inspire even veteran breasts with fresh assurances of success—bring light and cheer amid worldly depression and gloom. Then will they be an honor to Christianity, a new argument of its verity, and an added force to send it to the remote, and apply it to those near.

We have reason to take courage from this living accession God is making to us. We may not repine at the great secular catastrophe and revulsion, but accept it as a just discipline, and be thankful even for those quick-working breaks in the invisible enginery of God's Providence, which bring men to a stop in season not to leap the precipice.

We welcome these fresh co-workers, because, coming in as they do, we calculate that they come to be whole men—altogether on one side—that they come by that singular sort of consecration which gives up all to the Lord—body and soul—the man and the money—not trying to stand some where between, as if adjusting and connecting those great antagonisms—God and mammon ; just where any quantity of professing Christians seem to be standing ; I mean, *are* standing ; and what they are doing ; doing nothing as they ought to do—nothing largely and worthily for the Master; cankered, eaten all through with the rust of selfishness ; spoiled for any noble Christian work.

To any persons remotely meditating the hopes or profession of Christianity, we say, the Church nor the world want any more such Christians.

These anomalies of discipleship, these abnormals of the kingdom, who lay down a part of the price ;—give their carcasses and keep back their coffers ;—they bring neither power, nor credit, nor a blessing.

Is it not an astounding fact, when there is so much created in order to be given, and so many professed servants, new created of God who hold it, and are bound to give it—the oath of consecration most solemnly upon them—a world needing it, the world all thrown open to receive it or the Gospel it might send—its millions upon millions brought into vicinage, and we may come directly to

them, and impress them, and mould them, and put them in the way to heaven ; and yet it is a fact that the Church fails most frequently and decisively in meeting the cost ; as though she could not afford to set her dollars against the redemption of these souls. I fear she hardly puts down annually a dime against a soul. The men to go are oftener on hand ; it is the money that lags.

It does seem often as though the worst, the most cruel form of selfishness is this which links itself with religion and religious people. Oh ! this selfishness of the new man ; this Christian wordliness ; this baptized carnality ; this holy greed of gain ; what a demoniac heart thou hast. Accursed shape ! hellish thing ! away from our temples and our hearts. Let the Master come, if he must, with his scourge of cords, and drive him out of our temples and our hearts ; and himself possess us, and fill us with his own good Spirit.

But the blessed Master has another and a better way to purge out the evil, and take the possession, namely, by his truth and grace. This is the doctrine of the text and of all his Gospel. The Christian character is benevolence—the spirit of sacrifice and of work for a lost world. A missionary spirit is the measure of it ; a giving spirit, at once, the measure and the promoter of it.

Giving, then, is one of the means of grace—one of the best means of spiritual growth. If no good externally is done by the gifts, the charities, still a vital and immeasurable good is done to the giving soul—enough, and vastly more than enough, to justify the deed. The sordid taunt so often thrown, “ Why all this waste ?”—it comes of the sordidness that is equal to the sale of the Lord himself—the thirty pieces in the pocket better than He. I repeat, if no outer good is done, there is no waste ; no matter what the amount given, be it only enough ; if done with the Christian motive, then the character is set forward, and the Church is brought up higher and nearer to the millennial state. The Church must pass through the work and the sacrifice of establishing the millennium abroad, in order to make one in her own pale. Those final words of her Lord, then, which lay upon her this amazing responsibility, Go preach the Gospel—evangelize all nations ;—are to her an untold heritage of blessings and of blessedness. They embody the corrective and expulsion of her deadliest foes ; they are to her the necessary means of the victory, and the kingdom and the crown ; I mean on this ground of attainment—personal, separate fitness, reached by the culture and through the conflict of beneficent giving and doing. The question before us is, Will we meet these conditions, and have the millennium at home ; the kingdom within us—not forgetting the one condition our Lord so significantly marks—giving alms of such things as we have ?

To very many, this, as a means of grace—of spiritual advance,

stands in the first place, and is indispensable; stands in a sense even before prayer—they being ahead in prayer, behind in giving. To all those, then, who have given leanly and grudgingly, we say—arise and give—give bountifully—give heartily—give willfully—just because something within resists and says, I won't. Give the more and still more, from the very teeth and grip of the old retaining passion. Give with the measure and intent to crucify it ;—that hundred, the nail, that thousand the spike, that ten thousand the spear, and so proceed and persist till the base and slimy thing is wholly dead.

And in our dealings with others—the minister in his appeals to his people—must come to them with some authority, with a worthy object, and with a sizable claim. A small matter will not do the business with men; take them as they rise. The hearts of the majority are so snugly shut up—the orifice not unfrequently all tight and twisted and gnarled—if you would come upon it with any likelihood, it must be, not merely with a sharp tool, but with some bulk and weight; pry at it with a massive lever—some little local appeal will not make a passage. The field is the world—the instrument also. Then make the big world into a wedge, and drive that in, and so you shall succeed, and they and the world shall be the better for it.

Giving—doing—sacrificing, on the right scale, is not the only means of grace to ourselves ; it is the secret of power in what we do for the needy or perishing. Money so given that it does us good in the giving, does, we believe, vastly more good in its going forth. It takes, so to speak, an embalming and vitalizing from the heart it leaves, which gives it, or the truth it commissions, an imbedding in the hearts it goes to. A thorough victory over selfishness, achieved and shown on the part of Christians and the Church, becomes the miracle of the Gospel ;—its moral sign, which opens a path for it to the souls of skeptical or idolatrous men. What economy appears in the arrangement of means, and what responsibility it imposes, that our condition of power toward the world is simply that the Gospel, by our whole reception of it, has become a power upon us; first, a power upon us, then a power within, and a power emanant. The Gospel living in us, and working out, is its own witness. In this condition, we need spend no time in preliminaries, none in philosophizing or proving. Filled full of it ourselves, that is the argument—and overflowing—that the argument—and giving bountifully, and intently working for the good of others, that the argument. So was it with the Apostle Paul. Mighty as he was in the tread of his logic when he chose, in the main he was his own argument,—moved over lands and seas, himself a colossal demonstration. The same with the Christians then; their character; the reign of love throughout; their total conquest of selfishness—no man calling any thing he possessed his own;

that their argument. What they did, history tells us, and we shall repeat the achievement, when we repeat the character, and not till then. Our first responsibility is to be what we ought to be, and what we may be. The path is all open to the attainment—the Divine Helper open to our access; to him let us come, with hearts open and longing to receive the replenishments of good which shall eject the evil—those enrichments of grace, those treasured gifts of salvation, that repletion of the love divine which shall make us ready, eager even, for an work or sacrifice fitted to advance the kingdom and the glory of the Master.

SERMON XXXI.

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DISCOURAGEMENTS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

"FOR consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."—HEB. 12 : 3.

I BELIEVE there is not one of the Epistles of the New Testament—whether special, to particular churches, or catholic, to all Christians—that does not, over and over again, multiply exhortations and comforting assurances to those who have begun a Christian life, on the supposition that they are liable to discouragement and faint-heartedness, and that they need, again and again, to be inspired with hope and courage. There is nothing in human life that is not liable to turns of depression. It would be very strange, indeed, if Christian men, endeavoring to live a high moral and spiritual life, were not subject to the discouragements which belong to all human endeavors.

If there were no other than common natural weakness attaching to us in our religious life, it would be fit, occasionally, that we should be exhorted, comforted, and inspired. But there are causes which lie deeper than the mere capacity of being wearied, and deeper than this exhaustion, which overtakes us with discouragement—that work in the heart of man, to put unnecessary difficulties in his way. There are difficulties which, if explained, would cease to be any longer difficult.

It is for the purpose of setting before you, in some few particu-

lars, some of the causes of weakness, and so oftentimes of discouragement, that I shall speak to-night.

Some there are who begin well, in the Christian life, but of whom we never hear afterwards. They disappear like dew in the morning, which the sun drinks dry; only they are not drunk up by the Sun of Righteousness. Some hold on in respect to many things, but give over, early in their Christian career, the idea of a complete victory. They retreat to what may be called a sort of section-life, in which they take some section of Christian development, for the purpose of persevering only in that, while they reject the whole as too comprehensive for them. Some give up the devotional element. They think they are not specially called to the interior life of a Christian, but to outward moralities, or to what they call a more practical Christianity. If, for instance, they are so placed that in their business there are no special problems or difficulties which trouble them, they take the easiest side, and say: "We will become good, practical Christians, living as well as we know how, and leave others to indulge in the mere fancies of devotion." Others resort to the devotional element, because they happen to be so placed in life that they suffer conflict between their religious principles and their daily business; a conflict which requires of them constant self-denying processes. Their business has great difficulties for them, and so they abandon what they call practical morality, and take the higher ground of spiritual devotion. In other words, they make up in hymns what they lack in honesty; in prayers, what they lack in truthfulness; and in inward luxury of religion, what they lack in outward fidelity and daily service of God!

There is a kind of adjustment to which men must come—a correction of crude notions by stern experience. Perhaps one man out of twenty begins a Christian life, and holds out to the end as he began, only better and better; but I think that the nineteen in the twenty, beginning as they may, will go through a period in which there will certainly be discouragement, shrinking, hesitation, reasoning with themselves, and readjustment. They come, by and by, into their Christian life in good earnest, but not until they have gone through this preliminary fermentation.

There are so many who have been newly gathered into this church, and who have lately begun a Christian life, who are, in these respects, like-passioned with others, that it seems eminently fit that they should receive, in the beginning, a word of caution in regard to a great many of these points, in order that these readjusting processes, which, undoubtedly, they too must experience, may be consummated happily.

I shall point out some of the causes which will be liable to work discouragement among you.

1. Many persons are discouraged at the great difference which

they experience in their feelings, when they receive instruction from the ministrations of *other* people's minds, and when they are obliged to furnish *themselves* with the truth which is required for their daily Christian life.

In a time of unusual religious interest—when all men think and speak of religion—when unwonted power is put forth in the disclosure of religious truth—when men are brought into meetings morning and evening, and on multiplied occasions through the week—there is continually prepared for them and brought to bear on them a great and unusual amount of religious truth, which, spoken by men who are themselves awakened, and who are more fervent, more imaginative, and more emotive than they ordinarily are, is pressed home with power and effect, which they can hardly measure, and of which you are hardly aware. Many persons began their religious life amid such circumstances, who, as the general interest gradually ceases, and they are left to navigate alone, do not know the transition between receiving truth already prepared for them, and searching for truth and preparing it for themselves. They then fall into great straits. They do not know what the matter is. They can only say that they do not feel as they did before. They sometimes think that the Spirit has departed from them. At other times, they suppose they have lost their first love, and try to comfort themselves by thinking that every body must expect to experience less joy by and by, than at the beginning.

What would they think of a person who should rise in the morning, and be so intently occupied with the affairs of the house, that he should forget entirely to take any breakfast, and should go on singing without it, till ten or eleven o'clock? By this time, he would think he was going to be unwell! He does not know what the matter is; only he says: "I feel worse then when I arose." By and by, he comes to twelve and one o'clock, being still worse. He has forgotten his dinner too! He begins to feel still more mysterious sensations, and becomes very weak and faint. At last he bethinks himself to send for a physician—whom he asks: "What can be the matter with me?"

The physician inquires of him: "What did you eat for breakfast?"

The man hesitates a moment, and replies: "Oh! I forgot my breakfast."

"Well, what did you eat for dinner?"

"Ah! yes; I didn't eat any thing for dinner?"

"Why, your trouble is want of food. You are faint because you have eaten nothing. Go and get your dinner, and you will feel better."

He goes immediately to the table and eats a hearty meal; and on eating, he says: "Why, yes, that was just what was the matter with me!"

Many persons after partaking bountifully of the spiritual repast which is provided for them in church, on going away for a time, and being thrown into circumstances where, if they are to have food, they must themselves prepare it—where, if they are to have Scripture, they must themselves read it—where, if they are to have devout feelings, they must themselves pray; but who, when food is no longer offered to them, and forgetting to go and get it themselves, go without Scripture, without instruction, without prayer—lose their feelings, and wonder what is coming over them. Whereas, all the time, it is nothing but faintness from lack of food! If you would minister to yourself those things that were before ministered unto you, you would feel just the same now as at the beginning. That vision of Christ which made your heart respond and echo with joy, would awaken your joy again. But instead of waiting for others to hold up these thoughts and visions to you, you must call them up yourself. In other words, you must now earn your daily bread in spiritual things, just as children who come to years of majority, are obliged to earn their daily bread in secular things.

Wherever God, in his providence, may carry you, remember that some one must give you bread, or else you must get it yourself. You can not expect that your Christian feelings will continue in your heart, just because you have become a Christian. Many persons think that when the heart is changed, the causes of joy are implanted in it in such a manner, as that they shall go on with joy all the rest of the way through life. Christians, on the contrary, are day-clocks; you must wind them up every day, or they will neither tick, nor strike, nor tell the time. It is a mistake to suppose that Christians are like springs, that gush out of crystal fountains, which are so high and full and pure that neither summer nor winter can bring drought to their streams. The mountain top must forever condense the clouds, or mountain streams will cease to flow—and the Christian heart will cease to flow unless the life is carried so high up toward heaven, as forever to bring down supplies.

The eagerness with which persons begin the Christian life can not, of course, forever remain, although the earnestness may. I do not mean, that the prevalent popular notion, that Christians are happier at the beginning, than they ever will be afterwards, is true. I think, on the other hand, that every true Christian is less happy at the beginning, than he will be later in his course. But there are some kinds of enjoyment which belong to novelty and the first experiences. These must naturally die out; for, as grape-blossoms, fragrant as they are, must drop away, in order to give place to grapes, which are better, so there are some forms of early religious experience which must give way, in order to produce, in their places, certain others, which are better than they. Change is not destruction.

2. Many are liable to become wearied and faint, from positive reaction; from a depression arising from exhaustion. These include two classes of persons: those who are conscientious and nervous, and those who are not in good health. The element of health enters very largely into the question of emotive religious experience. It is not difficult for a person of a slender constitution, with but little nervous stamina, to be so exercised in a short time, that, according to the necessities of nature, he will suffer a prodigious reaction. Excitement in religion can be carried to excess, just as easily as in any thing else.

Many persons, in the early stage of their religious feelings, are without any moderation. They think, so that it be religion, that they can not have too much of it! But religious feeling excites men, just as really as any other feeling, and many persons have a good deal too much of it for their own good. There are persons who attend this church twice a day, who ought never to come but once, for the excitement of twice coming is more than they can bear. No man that lies awake all Sabbath night, and who requires half a week to get over the mere nervous excitement of an over-taxed brain, is serving God intelligently! They have no right to pervert the laws of nature in this way. There is to be a rational view in these things, as in all others.

It often happens, that in a contagious excitement, men who can not bear long-continued pressure, are so pressed, that at last, when they are brought out into such a state of religious enjoyment and luxury, they think of nothing so little as of economy, care, and watchfulness, in respect to their physical, psychological, and mental symptoms. By and by, when the external pressure is removed, they begin to decline, and go further and further down, not knowing where they will land. It seems to them as it seems in the night, when they sleep and dream that they are falling. Oh! that awful sense of falling in one's sleep! It is reproduced in the experience of persons who enter their Christian life, as they enter upon a strange joy in a dream, and who, when the stimulating causes of their excited feelings are removed, give way, and seem to themselves to be helplessly falling into the abyss of despair.

If persons in such circumstances are unwisely treated, it may be their utter destruction. I have known persons to be driven crazy from such a cause. I have known others, who fell into a state of fixed and settled melancholy, which was not eradicated in all the rest of their lives. Very great care should be taken, in the first place, to prevent such intense excitement; but where there has already been over-taxation, corresponding information and instruction should be given. Direction should be given, not that they should have a cumulation of conscience; not that they should sing more and pray more and go to meeting more, and in this way win

back their lost joy; but that they should have what they most need—*rest*. I would say to them, if from stimulating religious exercises you have already over-tasked your energies, you have gone beyond what nature can bear; these are the signals and tokens that you have transcended the limits of propriety. You now need rest, quietness, fresh air, wholesome food, recreation, and the removal of such acute and intense excitements, moral though they be; and to persons in such circumstances, such excitements are more moral than religious.

If persons, without sufficient strength or stamina to bear great excitements, find themselves swinging from their high joys, and visions, and ecstasy, into lower and less happy moods; if, further, they settle down through these, into states of feelings still lower, in which it seems as if darkness and night were gathering round them; if their old experiences are gone, and their yearnings for them do not bring them back; if, though they are willing to take up any cross, and to bear any burden, could only the old joy be restored, and the old emotions fill their hearts once more, these do not, nevertheless, return, and their hearts that cry out to be filled, are yet empty—if this is the condition in which men find themselves, against their will and wish, and in spite of their forced religious exercises and devotions, it is very plain that they are suffering from too great excitement, and that the remedy which they need is repose. They have over-taxed themselves, and they should be instructed to undo this mischief; and when it is undone, there will usually be no further trouble—till the next time, when they over-tax themselves again, and bring the old difficulty back once more.

3. Persons of a timid nature, whose religious life has either by education, or from something in themselves, turned upon conscience, or in whom their religious life is of the type of conscience rather than of love, or trust, or hope—are peculiarly liable to discouragement and weariness. For conscience, when it is the controlling element, is exacting and exhaustive, even though it be applied merely to external moralities. But, still more, when it is applied to the inner realm of the mind—to thought, to feeling, to motive, to the ideal of inward Christian life—conscience becomes excessively despotic, and beats down hope. No man is so often wearied and discouraged, as one whose life is set to the key-note of conscience—and not to love, or trust, or hope.

4. Great discouragement befalls men who have a religion without any social element to corroborate it. So far am I from thinking that meditation and solitary exercises are indispensable to religion, that it is almost a miracle that men in such circumstances are good. I can conceive, now and then a nature with force and resource enough to be good in a cloister or a cave; but usually speaking, I think a man's piety is mouldy, poor, and mean, who is shut up from the social element of religion. When, therefore, men

are converted, and are brought into the Church, it is to the last degree important, that they should be surrounded with friends, and should experience the genial stimulus of social life. When they have no friends around them, or when they are obliged to abandon their old associates, and find no new ones in their places; when, in some measure, they are attempting to live a kind of secret and undisclosed religion—it is almost morally certain, that such persons will be liable to great despondency and discouragement. Therefore, I think that, among the earliest things which a person ought to find, who is beginning a Christian life, should be some confidential friends, of like mind with himself, to whom he may speak of his conflicts, his troubles, his temptations; and with whom he can hold pleasurable and intimate fellowship, such as he does not with his ordinary acquaintances in the world. There is in every man this necessity of social life; and the more there is of it in him, the more indispensable it will always be that this element should exist in his religion. There are men who were generous, large, cheerful, and happy before they came into the Church, but who, after they were in, grew lean, pinched, poor, and unhappy. They were genial and attractive before, but afterwards no body else seemed to want their society, and they seemed to want no body else's. Whatever they may have been before their church connection, they contrived afterwards to drop the social element out of their life; and their character, taken as a whole, has less symmetry now than before. It does violence to the design of God, and to the symmetrical development of the character of man, to take away any part of human nature.

When a man begins a Christian life, his passions are not to run riot, or be allowed to do what they please; yet the man who puts out the fires of passion, because he has become a Christian, only weakens and not profits himself. God gave them to man for good uses. They are to be regulated, controlled, but not destroyed. I would as soon think of putting out the fires of a steamer on the Ocean, for the sake of making a good voyage to Liverpool, as to put out the passions of my own nature for the sake of making a good voyage to heaven. The passions were meant to give men force, and to add juice and power to the soul. No man can afford to put out his mere passionnal nature, still less can he afford to put out the social and the imaginative element.

To become a Christian, does not mean that you are to creep into a convent-box, or to be screwed up like a man in a living coffin. That is not piety. To become a Christian, is to bring the whole nature out more powerfully than ever before, to take all the faculties that God gave you originally, and which have been going to waste or perversion, and so to bring them under the dominion of God, that there shall not be a loss of any part of your nature, but that all your powers shall work together in accordance with the

divine plan, being all controlled and guided by the superior element of spiritual love.

The mischief of doing away with the social element is very great, and we are very liable to it in cities. Young men who find themselves, on coming here from the country, in undesirable companionships, coming, as they frequently do, with a religious education, only to forget their Bible, and remaining here for years, making only such friends as they would not acknowledge at home—when at length they are touched by the Spirit of God and begin to live a Christian life, and when, in doing it, they leave off their wicked associates, ought immediately to see to it that they find new and good friends to take the place of the old and bad. It is right to break off from wicked associates. If they are plague-struck, and you would not take it, you must keep clear of them. If they offer you temptations to drinking, to gambling, or to any thing vicious and wicked, it is, of course, best that you should break company with them, and no longer remain their associates. But if a man has no friend to take the place of these—if there are no brothers, no sisters, no family (blessed be the family! for I never feel so sure about young converts, as when I find out that they are living in Christian families of their parents, or of their relatives or friends)—he should set about, as soon as possible, finding proper Christian associates and confidants.

Sometimes I ask a man who has newly become a Christian:

"Have you any associates in the Church?"

"None."

"Do you know any body in the city?"

"Nobody; except that I am in the store of a Christian merchant."

Ah! yes! In the same store with a Christian merchant! That sounds very well; but after all, a Christian merchant is apt to be only a merchant. The clerk is to have so much a month, or so much a year, and the Christian merchant pays this, and that is all. He does not hire him with a perquisite of visiting his family! He does not undertake to be a father to him. No! that don't belong to a Christian merchant! He does not undertake to look after his clerks in any such way! He may have eighteen, twenty, twenty-five young men in his employ, every one of whom had praying fathers and mothers, and whom he knows to be touched in the direction of a religious life; yet it is not his business to talk to them on such subjects, nor to give them his own society—else it would have been in the bargain!

The young man is in the store of a Christian merchant; but that does him no good. He is obliged to say: "I have no companionship." He is thus compelled to begin his Christian life without staff or stay. It is very important, I repeat, that when men become Christians, they should find company. This is a necessity of human nature. Among Christians there should be

fellowship. I suppose that this was the reason why churches were ordained. When you turn from the world, to go toward heaven, you should walk together; you should hold each other up; you should know each other; you should love each other; the social element should surround you, and should work itself into a religious element.

5. Many persons are brought into great discouragement and uncertainty as to what they shall do, because they have mistaken the full purport of religion. Instead of "breaking off sins by righteousness," they have simply "broken off their sins." They were very wicked men, who supposed that by ceasing to be wicked, they thereby became good. No, not at all! This can not be!

Suppose a man has a gnarly old apple tree in his orchard—very wide-spread and rank in its growth—with every apple so sour as scarcely to need fermentation to make it vinegar! He says: "Now I am going to have better fruit than this." And he takes his saw, in the spring, and cuts off one branch here, and another there, until there is nothing left but the trunk.

"There," he says, "I have now got a good fruit tree."

He is now rid of his sour fruit; but he has not yet got the sweet. He must now graft the tree with some choice variety that he may select. If he makes no adequate provision for this, there will be side-shoots, or water-sprouts; and there will be the same fruit-buds, and the same sour apples over again. Some men think they have become Christians because they do not grow any more sour fruit; because they have simply broken off their old wicked courses—because they do not ride out of town any more on Sundays—because they do not drink any more—because they do not gamble any more—because they have left off swearing, and bad company—because they do not lie and cheat—any more than is necessary in this wicked world! But men, to be Christians, must be more than this! Simply omitting their wrong courses is not enough. "Cease to do evil—learn to do well." This is the command. It is not single, but double. It is not simply to break off sin, but to break off sin by righteousness. It is not only to cease to do wrong, but to begin to do right.

If a man has been wicked, the way for him most effectually to break off his wickedness, is to enter now upon a life of positive goodness. If a man has been very active in wickedness, he ought, for his own safety, after his conversion, to be proportionately active in goodness. It will not do for him to say:

"I was headlong and precipitate in evil; I will be slow and cautious in good."

On the contrary, a wicked man of great force of character ought, after he is converted, to exert all that force of character for good. He should be just as ambitious and active now as he was before,

only, of course, in another direction. A man who ran express along the way of wickedness, ought not to creep along the way of goodness. If I see a man who has simply broken off his evil habits, I say to myself, it is very doubtful if that man will hold out. But if he has not only broken off the bad, but taken on the good in their place, he is then in the fair way of success. If he has gone with all sail set for Satan, and then, veering around, goes with all sail set for Christ, it is right to expect that such a man will succeed. But a fat sinner should not make a lean Christian!

The same is true of persons who have not been very bad, in the sense of outbreaking wickedness, but who have great fullness of nature, and activity of feeling. I meet, in social life, persons of whom I think—though I may not say it in words to them—somewhat in this manner: With the largeness with which you love—with the much there is in your mind and your imagination—with the eagerness of your will-power—with the fertility of your pride—with your prevailing sense of self—with all these, you can never be a happy Christian unless you are an *eminent* one. I always know that such persons will fall into embarrassments, doubts, disappointments, and, ultimately, into discouragements. I know not a few, recently introduced into this church, who are now in this pass. They are going through a fermentation. What the matter is, they do not know. Persons of a full, large nature, when they attempt to be Christians by serving Christ as little as possible, will necessarily go through pain and signal discipline of experience, before they will come to peace; and they never will come to it, till their whole soul is yielded up to the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are just as active for good, as they have hitherto been for selfishness.

6. The neglect to consolidate religious feelings into habits, is frequently an occasion of discouragement, because it leaves men subject to all the fluctuations of feeling. Feeling, by its very nature, rises and falls, comes and goes. Emotions are like the leaves of a tree. Every flourishing tree must have both its solid parts, and its movable and tender parts. The leaf is not made merely for its beauty, nor for the shade which it casts gratefully down, at mid-day in summer. Graceful and delicate as it seems, every leaf is a laboratory. On its surface, the crude sap, exposed to light and warmth, is changed to organizable matter; and that liquid current which ascended the interior of the trunk, when leaf-touched, descends upon its exterior surface, depositing solid matter, all the way down to the root again. Thus those tender leaves, which any child may crush in his hand, which the rude winds may easily blow away, are silently and constantly building stronger in every branch, and stouter in every fiber of the trunk, that solid frame of the tree, which time can scarcely wear out, and winds and storms beat upon in vain! They are taking away from the movable and fragile part of the tree, to add to the firm and

immovable part. Now, feeling is like a leaf. It should organize habits. It should consolidate transient tendencies into abiding and enduring experiences. It should take what at first are fluctuating emotions, and turn them into settled habits. That is only a miserable type of Christian life, which comes and goes with moods and feelings. But in this way, many Christians fight the same battles over and over again, year after year, and thus at the end of forty years, find that they are struggling with the same tendencies and temptations which they encountered at the beginning! They go, year after year, the same round of wearisome and discouraging temptations, either weakly yielding to them, or else contending against them with doubtful battle. On the other hand, a Christian whose fluctuating feelings are brought to crystallize into settled habits, will gain new victories as he gains new strength, day by day!

7. Many men are convicted of sin less deeply at the beginning of their Christian life, than long after their conversion; and this not only alarms but seriously discourages them. They do not feel as they once did, nor as they expected they always would. As their conception of duty is being raised, they find that their self-complacency is being disturbed. Such persons, sometimes, instead of becoming happier, as they should, become less happy.

In certain natures (which I shall not now stop to analyze) the introduction of a new and higher standard into the mind, throws all the feelings out of balance, and makes an unexpectedly great resistance. In many persons, while they are living by the average standard of morality that exists in the community, their nature seems to be tranquil, and they get along very well, and with very little trouble. But, when they introduce a higher standard, and undertake to live by that, they immediately arouse within themselves elements of rebellion, surprising to them and to all who know them. Some Christians rise from the lower grounds of experience, by an easy and natural progress, happy in the beginning, and happy at each spiral which they make in their upward flight. Like the sky-lark, some notes they murmur on the ground, but their song really begins only when, with out-spread wing, in circles growing wider and higher, they reach up far above the hearing of men! But there are others who, like timid forest birds, driven out by the hunter, seem never so much lost as when they are far up above all covert or thicket, in the open and unobstructed space. Their fears chase them as hawks, nor have they one note till they can hide darkling again in the green thicket.

In regard to all these instances—and there are others which might be mentioned, if time would permit—let me say, first, that, simply because you have experienced difficulties which you did not expect, or because you are faint and discouraged, you must not allow yourselves to go back. It is not a question of mere

accomplishment, to be determined by your own volition. If a man proposes to make a tour of the continent of Europe, and on reaching London or Paris, prefers, for some reason, to turn back instead of going further, he may do it, without either losing character or incurring reproach. His own pleasure determines what he shall do—whether to go one way or the other—whether to come home from Florence or go on to Rome—whether to come home from Rome or go on to the East. But when a man begins his journey toward heaven, it is not optional with him, at any point of the way, to turn back. It is his duty to go on! It is a question not only of honor, but of safety, to continue. Being a Christian is not the same as making money, of which a man can make more or less, as he chooses, and then stop—although he does not usually wish to stop. To be a Christian is to begin and not stop; it is to put the hand to the plow, and not look back. If a man is called, in the providence of God, to begin a Christian life, in which he succeeds very well for a time, but afterwards finds clouds and darkness gathering about him, he must think only of going on, and never for a moment of going back. To return would be perilous, as well as disgraceful. If he droops and is weary in the pursuit of the right, and turns aside from the search, he is giving way to what will inevitably lead him, by and by, into still greater doubt, difficulty, and discouragement. If you give up trying now, trusting in your Christian hope to lift you, by and by, out of the marsh, upon solid ground, you will never be lifted out. The condition of your final triumph is that you are willing to struggle all the time that may be required to win it. If you find it hard now to bring your heart into obedience to Christ, what will be your later experience, when your difficulties will be greater and greater, and your strength to overcome them less and less? It never will be so easy again, as now, to persevere in the Christian life. To conform to the Christian requisition will be harder and harder, the longer you put it off. The earliest months of campaigning, of studying, of learning a trade, are the most difficult months. From this point onward the way grows smoother and easier. And in like manner, in beginning a Christian life, the chief difficulties are at the threshold.

There is a remarkable contrast in this respect, between right and wrong-doing—between virtue and vice: to do right is harder at first, than it ever will be afterwards; it grows easier and easier to the end. To do wrong, involves few difficulties at first, but more and more every day, until its end is destruction. Pleasure invites us to flowery paths only for the first part of the journey; all the rest of the way it grows less and less beautiful, and more and more dangerous. Virtue calls us, for the first few steps, over a stony road, which grows less and less rugged, and more and more easy to the end. Men enter wrong courses through the gate of sweet

blandishments, but as they go on, they find that all the promises, at the beginning, were false and deceitful. The "narrow way" is entered through the "strait gate," but the path is the path of the just, and is as a shining light that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day! The beginning of the one is fair, but its end is death. The beginning of the other is less comely, but its end is eternal life.

The early steps of a Christian life are the most rugged. The tasks of a Christian are never so severe and forbidding as at the first. The farther end of the Christian life is the easier. We begin a worldly life by going down a slope, whose first descent is easy; but as soon as we are in the valley, behold! mountains rise up on either side. We begin the Christian life by going up hill, and with hard climbing; but by and by we come to the level plains and table-lands at the top, where the way is easy, where the air is pure, and where we are lifted up high above the dust, and noise, and conflict of the lower life.

Take courage, then, in the thought that your work is harder now than it ever will be again; that the more vigorously you begin, the more successfully you will finish; that the more severe your discipline is at first, the easier will your trials be at last; that the heavier your burdens are now, the stronger you will be to bear them by and by, and the lighter they will be to bear. He who is willing to take the hardest way at first, will, in that very choice, find for himself the easiest way in the end!

If it be any encouragement to know that those who have been tasked as you, tempted as you, tried as you, discouraged as you, wearied as you, faint as you, have nevertheless persevered unto victory—take that encouragement, and go on in your way rejoicing! If any of you have been tempted to swerve, cease your faint-heartedness, and remember that nothing strange has befallen you! You are suffering only such temptations as have befallen all God's children, and you may be sure that he will not suffer you to be tempted more than you are able to bear! I suppose that there is not one saint who now stands elate and jubilant in heaven, who could not narrate experience equivalent to yours. It would be different in form, but the same in substance. It would show the same necessity of toils and burdens, of discipline and trial, of struggle and conflict! It may not be a great comfort to know that they who went before you were embarrassed and perplexed; but it is a comfort to know that your difficulties and embarrassments are not because you are not a Christian, and that they are incident to all Christian life!

When men come to swollen streams, which they must needs ford, they look with troubled face upon the wide and rapid water; and it is a great comfort to see fresh hoof-marks along the bank, which show that other travelers have recently crossed that way. They

drive down to the water's edge, but still dreading to venture in, look at the foam and the anger of the torrent, fearful that sudden freshets, loosed from the mountain side, may have over-swollen it since its passage by those who are ahead. They hear the sound of voices on the other side, of men whom they can not see, in that dense forest, yet who have just gone over the river, and are not yet out of hailing distance. The tremulous men at the brink call out: "Ho! strangers, is the river passable?" And as the sound dies away among the forest trees, the salute is answered, as with an echo: "We have just crossed! All safe!—Come on!" At this summons, they step in, but in a moment the water grows deeper, and the roar of the flood is more fearful! Every man among them is bewildered. The stoutest heart quails. The water is already pattering around the flanks of the horses, and is getting deeper and deeper every moment. The foremost rider looks around almost as if he would go back! Ah! my friend, you can not go back now! It is perilous to turn around in a ford. It is as easy to go all the way over to the other side, as to go back from where you started! They begin to be more alarmed; but the men already over, who have come back again to the bank to see how those who are following them may fare, smile to see the fear that is written upon their troubled faces. The water is above the saddles, and is careering over the horses' backs. Every man now says to himself: "It is swim or drown; I must go through or go under." But the foremost man has passed the center of the channel, where the water begins to lick the backs of the horses less and less, and to subside along the ribs down toward the stirrups! He shouts out to the rest: "Ho! I am past the channel! Come on!" The worst will soon be over. In all the rest of his passage, he is rising, at every step, higher and higher out of the flood, and is coming nearer and nearer the opposite bank. The rest that are behind, take new hope, and plunge into the channel as though they had at first feared no danger, and all reach in safety the other shore!

O Christian! standing in fear by the side of the flood, fearing to enter in, and cross to the other shore, others who have gone before are standing on those distant shores, and calling out to you to "take courage and plunge into the wave!" The voices of friends are calling on the other side: "Come over, come over!" The voices of companions, the voices of children who have passed safely through; the voices of parents long gone over; the voice of the loved and lost—lost on this side but saved on the other—are calling out across the stream: "Come over! come over!" Angels and shining ones stand with them on the bank, and mingle their voices with these, saying and beckoning: "Come over! come over!"

The testimony of all who have tried the stream is but one unanimous voice: "We came over safe! We came over safe!"

O Christian! faint not, but follow after! A little more fording, and you shall find that the waters, instead of growing deeper, will grow less deep; and you will rise out of the flood and stand safe upon the other shore! Do not be discouraged, therefore, because you are not yet landed. Do not faint because you are yet in the struggle. You shall by and by be across the channel and over the stream, and stand victorious on the other side! May God grant to every one of you the victory through Christ, our hope and our Redeemer! Amen!

SERMON XXXII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, VICTORY, AND CROWN.

"I HAVE fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."—2 TIM. 4: 7, 8.

THE person here addressed was Timothy, Paul's "own son in the faith." He was converted when a youth by Paul's preaching at Derbe. Timothy, who seems to have been a youth of peculiar interest, had long been Paul's companion and fellow-laborer. He loved him as a father loves a child, because he had been the instrument of his conversion, and because he was faithful in the work and cause of Christ. From long years of labor and sufferings together, Timothy was well acquainted with the privations, self-denials, and incessant toils of Paul in the cause of his Divine Master. "Thou knowest," said he, "my manner of purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, and persecutions, which I endured." The strength and vigor of his manhood the Apostle had faithfully devoted to the service of his Lord, but now he was such an one as Paul the aged, and also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. The frost of age had settled upon his brows, though it had not chilled his heart. His strength and vigor had been worn out in the service of his Master. God had preserved him, indeed, for many years, while walking in the midst of dangers and death, but now his work was done, and he was ready, as his last act, to offer up his soul to the same cause to which he had devoted his life, and to seal with his blood the testimony which he had uniformly borne to the truth of the Gospel.

"I am ready to be offered, and when I am gone, take, my son,

your spiritual father as an example. You have witnessed my labors and dangers, sufferings and sacrifices, doctrine and manner of life: follow me, so far as I have followed Christ; and if you have witnessed my trials and sufferings, you have also for your encouragement, witnessed my hopes, my joys and consolations in Christ."

The situation of this great and good man in prison, and ready to be offered, his reflections and prospects, his consolations and joys, in the full view of approaching death, form together an interesting object of contemplation. We are particularly struck by his triumphant feelings, such as nothing but the Christian religion ever inspired in such a situation, and are led to inquire what were the reflections, and what the prospects, which could thus dissipate the gloom of a prison, and deprive the king of terrors of his power. The Apostle is standing on the verge of the eternal world. He casts his eye back over that part of his life, which had been devoted to the cause of Christ, and forward to the glories of eternity opening on his view. His hopes of the future are founded on his retrospect of the past. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Let us for a few moments turn our attention to the particulars, here noticed in this brief review of his Christian life.

1. "I have fought a good fight." He had been a good soldier in the cause of Christ. Faithful and zealously devoted to his Master, his natural impetuosity, when enlisted in his service, led him to throw himself in the fore front of the hottest battle, and with eager intrepidity to challenge forth the boldest champions in the hosts of infidelity. He hesitated not to declare the honors of his King before the bitterest of his own bigoted countrymen, before the contemptuous philosophers of Greece, before profligate Roman governors, and before Nero himself; considering it not the least consolation in his imprisonment, that it enabled him, at his trial, to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ to those to whom otherwise he could not have access. He not only faced danger, but also endured hardness as a good soldier of Christ. Fatigues, hardships, famine, and sufferings were his constant companions. Stoned in one city for preaching the Gospel, and dragged out for dead, as soon as he was able to rise, it was to preach the Gospel again. Thrown into prison, and confined in fetters, the moment he was released he commenced his warfare anew. Shipwrecked thrice, five times scourged by the Jews, thrice beaten with rods, in perils by sea and land, from his own countrymen, from the heathen, and from false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings oft, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in journeyings oft, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft—none of these things moved him to desist a moment from the arduous and perilous contest, neither did he count his life dear unto himself, that he might advance the conquests of the cross. But out of all these hardships and dangers

the Lord had delivered him. Now his warfare was accomplished, and he was waiting for the moment when he should be released from his arduous service, and enter upon triumphant joys, in the realms of eternal peace.

2. "I have finished my course." This expression is an allusion to the race practiced at the Grecian games. In this race, the competitors put forth every exertion to outstrip each other in their course, while at the goal stood the judges, with crowns or garlands of leaves, with which to crown the victor. This bore so strong a resemblance to the Christian race of holiness, that the Apostle frequently alludes to it, especially in his letters to Grecian churches. "Know ye not that they who run in a race, run all, but one obtaineth the prize?" "So run," says he, "that ye may obtain." He would teach us by this comparison, that to fulfill the Christian course, calls for continual and unwearied exertion. We are never to relapse into indolence, but to make every effort, as much as if the event continued uncertain, till, by reaching the goal, we become sure of the prize. For such great and continual exertion, we need to be temperate in all things—to keep under our body, and to lay aside every weight that might clog and retard us in our course. We need also the grace of our ascended Lord, we need to look for encouragement to his own bright example, and for hope to the crown of rejoicing which he will give to all who come off conquerors in the race, and to be animated by the example of all those who have gone before us. "Wherefore," says he, "seeing we are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God." And every man that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, a fading, withering crown of leaves, but we, an incorruptible, even a crown of glory, that fadeth not away. "I therefore so run not as uncertainly." The Apostle did not run in such a languid desultory manner as to leave it uncertain whether he should obtain the prize. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." Every part of his own life, as recorded, agrees with this account of his race of holiness. It was a life of unceasing and vigorous activity. The close of one action was the beginning of another. The passage from preaching the Gospel in one place, was immediately to preaching it in the next, the completion of one missionary tour was but a preparation for a second, in which he should take a wider range. When he could not travel, he was preaching, when he could not preach, being confined in prison, he was writing. Had

he been impelled, by some secret influence, to incessant activity, he could not, apparently, have done more in the service of his Master. But his race was now run. He was closing the last epistle, as it is supposed, that he ever wrote—he had reached the goal at his grave. "I have finished my course."

3. "I have kept the faith." He did not reckon it among the least of his consolations, when ready to be offered, that he had kept the faith. His penetrating eye distinctly saw the connection between the doctrines of faith, and all that is experimental and practical in religion. Men are justified and saved by belief of the truth, not by belief of error; and the Holy Spirit regenerates and sanctifies through the instrumentality of truth, and not falsehood. Men feel their need of a Saviour, because they believe and know that they are themselves sinful and condemned. They trust in his righteousness, when they see that they have none of their own, because they believe that he has made atonement, and is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him; and Christ thus received into the heart by faith, is the source of holy life and actions.

The warfare he had accomplished, the race he had run, the faith he had preserved, was the ground of his glorious hope of immortality—a hope that shed a lustre over his closing hours, and lifted him with triumph above the fear of death. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand."

It may be well contrasted with the dying words of any man that ever left this world without the hopes of the Gospel, and should stimulate all to imitate the glorious life of this eminent servant of God, that they also may die the death of the righteous, and that their last end may be like his. It should arouse us all to fight the good fight of faith, to finish our course with joy, to keep the faith, that there may be laid up for us also a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to all that love his appearing. Indeed, this is the very effect which the Apostle intended this expression of his feelings should have upon his dearly beloved son in the faith.

4. Fearing that Timothy might be discouraged by the sufferings to which his spiritual father was called, and which might one day come upon himself, he wished to brace up his soul to endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ, and to fight manfully the good fight of faith. He therefore gave him this, his dying testimony, to the truth and power of that religion which he had professed and taught. He told him that, having coolly reviewed all that he himself had done and suffered for the cause of Christ, as well as considered the death which was now before him, he could assure him that he had nothing to regret, but every thing to animate and support him. He knew in whom he had believed. He was confident that his Saviour was able to keep that which he had

committed to him, against that day. He had not a doubt of receiving the crown of rejoicing, which the Lord would give to all them that love his appearing. He spoke from experience and knowledge.

My friends! what more can we ask to confirm our faith, and animate our obedience? The Apostle certainly knew whether the things he had taught were true or false—whether those things to which he had testified were cunningly devised fables, or real facts which he had himself witnessed.

When we reflect on the character of this great Apostle, and what numbers, even whole churches owed their own selves, their everlasting salvation to his disinterested labors—now aged, destitute, in prison, forsaken of all, about to be offered, with a prophetic foresight of the perilous times that should come upon the Church after his death, can we wonder if even his joys should be tinged a little with the sadness of surrounding objects, and the expression of his hopes softened by an infusion of melancholy?

Again : “At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all forsook me, I pray God, it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Here, indeed, is consolation, there is more than consolation, there is triumphant faith, and hope, and joy. It is consolation which strongly reminds us of the sufferings to which it came as a relief. It is the triumph of a hero, whose heart swells with exultation at the thought that he has delivered his country, and himself; but is softened by the thoughts of the sufferings she has received in the conflict, the brave men who had fallen, the treachery of those who had deserted her cause, and the future evils, to which she will be exposed.

The mingled emotions expressed by the Apostle, remind us of the setting sun, whose parting beams, though bright, are softened by the gloom of the landscape over which they are thrown, and the clouds gathered around him only seem more fully to show the glory of his departing beams. This picture should teach us the nature of Christian faith and hope, and what we are to expect on this side the grave.

Christ came to heal the sick, to cure the broken-hearted, to bind up the wounds of the bruised, to seek and to save that which was lost. He is a refuge to which the afflicted flee; a covert and a hiding-place from the storms of sorrow. Every part of his religion and the comforts it brings, at least in this world, bear a relation to sin and suffering. Even the joy which it brings, is of the nature

of support, of comfort, of consolation, and hope. Through Christ we are happy, in a refuge from the evils with which this world abounds. We are happy in comfort and consolation, under affliction and sorrow. We are happy, in the exercise of faith in a Saviour, who has delivered us from sin and its dreadful punishment to which we were exposed, and happy in the hope of a termination of our present troubles, and of our future introduction to perfect and unclouded joy.

Benevolence is happy, though it weeps over the sin and misery with which it is here in so close a contact. Love to God and delight in his government, is a source of constant joy, yet often tinged with sorrow, for the dishonor which we are obliged to see cast upon his name, the violation of his laws, rebellion against his government, while the good, which he will cause from them to abound to his glory, is not seen, but only believed by faith.

We may, indeed, conceive of faith so strong, as to yield unmixed joy in surveying the actual state of things, and the government of God, knowing that he will cause all to promote his own glory. But such heavenly views of the government of God, are rarely given to us, in this world of misery and sin; and no degree of religion can be conceived, which shall prevent the body from feeling pain, disease, and want, or the soul from being wounded, when the tenderest relations in this life are torn asunder. The fact is, God knew that his children would not be perfectly freed from sin in this world, and therefore saw good to continue them in circumstances not entirely free from suffering.

This world, to the Christian, is a place of discipline. His life to the very close, is a warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our whole course in this world is a race, which we are to run with all diligence, that we may make our calling and election sure; and we must not expect to reach the goal but in the grave. If we so run as to obtain, our path shall be like the rising light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The shades of sin and sorrow shall gradually pass away, and the light of Eternity break in upon our souls. Although on our departing step, we may cast a sad and pitying glance on the world we are about to leave, and heave a sigh on the sin and misery we could not cure, yet, blessed be God, it will be the last throb of sorrow that shall ever agitate our bosoms.

When I have safely reached my home,
My God, my heaven, my all,
There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast.